

Classroom Activities

Listed below are several classroom activities for you to use when discussing elections and voting. These activities are designed to help your students bridge the gap between civics education and civic participation. Take the time to show your students how to vote, the importance of voting, and the impact their voices can make in their communities.

Schedule “mock” classroom activities so that they coincide with “real-life” events, giving your activities more relevance and comparative value.

- Mock candidate debate- before a major candidate debate.
- Mock election- before the General Election (November 4, 2008).

Take on real challenges as classroom projects and help students see that they can make an impact in their community.

- Hold a voter registration drive.
- Man the ASB election; assign jobs to each student and borrow the county’s voting equipment and ballots.
- Have students look up their elected officials on MyVote and write a letter to the appropriate person in response to an issue they care about.
- Ask students to write a letter/newspaper article about a recent issue to a local newspaper.
- Give extra credit to students volunteering as a poll worker or an election observer.

Have fun! Show your students that elections are exciting and engaging.

- Hold a voter registration drive contest between classes or grades.
- Host a scavenger hunt for items that help students complete their CBA: a letter to an elected official about an issue, a letter from an elected official about the student’s issue, campaign literature about the issue, literature from a special interest group about the issue, a newspaper article about the student’s issue, etc.
- Create campaign slogans and posters for candidates or issues.
- Create voting themed video or radio PSAs.

Talk to the people who know elections best.

- Invite a county elections department staff member to your classroom to explain an election process, such as voter registration or ballot tabulating.
- Invite an elected official to talk to your students about how voting can impact their community.
- Take a trip to your county elections department during ballot tabulating and get an onsite tour of the facilities and machines.

Make it a CBA!

- Civics CBAs are required or recommended for grades 4/5, 7/8, 11/12.
- Many of the activities listed here can be used to complete or prepare for a Civics CBA in Constitutional Issues or Checks & Balances.



Classroom Discussions

Intelligent, unbiased discussions can be difficult to facilitate. Try these tips in your classroom:

What to do:

1. Make it “real.” Focus on current events featured in the news. Either choose an article for your students, or have them bring news clippings in.
 - *The goal is not only to help them understand the topic, but where to get good information.*
2. Make it fair. Assign half the class to defend one side of an issue, and the other half against. Students will feel more free to discuss the issues if it’s not “their” position that they’re defending.
 - *Ask the class to draw up discussion rules together, then help them stick to it during the discussions.*
3. Make it regular. Don’t be discouraged if the first few times don’t go so well. Students may need time to feel comfortable speaking and to understand the issues. Plan to help them through the early discussions, then ease yourself out of the process.
4. Make it count. Keep track of who has already had a turn to speak, and encourage the quiet ones. Arrange the desks in a circle to facilitate conversation. Counting discussions as an assignment might motivate students, but be careful to grade for participation, not content.

What NOT to do:

1. Debate is encouraged, but DO NOT allow personal attacks.
2. Arguments should be based on facts, not personal beliefs. Like a well-written essay, no statement should start with, “I think that...”
3. Give candidates equal time; you don’t want to seem as campaigning. Focus on candidates’ debates and speeches. These are the rhetoric masters; ask your students to examine how they deliver their messages.
4. Do not dominate the conversation. Let your students fill in awkward pauses, and if it comes to a silent stand-off, threaten to draw names out of a hat.
5. Keep your opinions to yourself! Remember, your job is to frame the initial question, move the discussion along, and make sure everyone is following the rules of the discussion. If a student asks for your opinion, turn it back on them: “I’m more interested to here what you think about it.”
 - *Ideally, your students should never know which party you support or what organizations you belong to. To have an honest discussion, your students must feel “safe” and not think that you take their arguments personally.*

